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ABSTRACT

Researchers and teachers are beginning to realize that reading and writing are closely linked. Language experience is the key to success in reading and writing. Teachers must enrich students' language experiences by reading to them, talking with them, fostering an environment that recognizes their worth as language users, and modeling expected reading and writing behaviors. There are also correlations between the stages of the reading and writing processes. Like the prewriting stage, reading instruction should involve students in prereading activities to activate relevant background knowledge and familiarize them with the organizational structure of the text. Instruction in reading and writing should focus on whole pieces of text, and skill development should focus on higher levels of comprehension. Since comprehension must come from the meaning that the reader brings to the text, open-ended questions in interpretation, inferences, and relating the text to personal experience all enhance a child's enjoyment and understanding of what has been read. Errors in both reading and writing also have meaning, and expanding reading experiences or providing students with strategies to eliminate errors from their written products are ways to capitalize on this error information. In looking at these connections, teachers must not lose sight of the fact that the writer needs a reader and students must be both. Teachers need to be ready to assess students not only in relation to the product but also in relation to the processes involved in reading and writing. (HTH)

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READING AND WRITING: CONNECTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

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CS 208 332

Reading and Writing: Connections and Instructional Implications

When faced with the question "What effects do you think your work in writing has had on you as a reader?", fourth grade students from P.S. 230 in Brooklyn responded with insight. Jackie thought that she read better because she now knew what to look for, and Timmy suggested that you can feel sorry for the author if he has written something boring because you now know how hard it is to write. These young students already realize the connection between reading and writing.

Yet for at least the last thirty years reading and writing have not been connected. Reading has dominated the scene in language arts instruction, the field of research, and the area of financial funding. In most elementary classrooms, reading instruction dominates the day, starts the instructional agenda, controls classroom grouping, and dictates schedules.

Only recently - within the last ten years - has more attention been given to writing. We have learned more in those ten years about what writers do, how the writer develops, and how to teach writing than we learned in the previous hundred. Researchers and teachers are beginning to realize that reading and writing are closely linked. If these two aspects of language arts are not the opposite sides of the same coin, they are closely connected and similar in many ways. In the material which follows, I would like to not only explore these connections and similarities, I would also like to suggest some classroom practices to develop students' ability in reading and writing.

Language - Key to Success in Reading and Writing

The child who comes to school with a wide and varied background in language is the child who is more apt to be successful in both reading and writing. The child who has been read to, has had an opportunity to talk with peers and adults, raises questions and answers some, is the child who can develop as a reader and writer. The child who has been an active participant in language experiences will be the one who progresses with a minimum of difficulty in both reading and writing.

Many children, however, come to school with a deficit in such language experiences, and such children may be doomed to a long struggle in the educational system. Nearly every report which assessed education over the past two years - Nation at Risk, the Carneige report - all point to the centricity of language in a student's education. Without language facility, the student may face failure in all school experiences.

The teacher who has the child in the classroom who lacks language experience has a moral and professional responsibility to expand that experience. Teachers must read to children; they must talk with children; they must foster an environment which recognizes the child's worth as a language user.

In addition, the teacher must model the behaviors expected from the child. Students need to recognize their teachers as readers and writers. In the early years, children have a great deal of adulation for the teacher. How effective it would be if part of that adulation included the recognition that the teacher valued

both reading and writing. And that value would be apparent if the teacher did read in class and shared what was read with students. The same can be said to support the idea that the teacher must also write, must struggle with the process and must share that experience in the classroom. Because it can be safely said that many children will not witness the adult as a reader or writer unless it is the teacher actively modeling those activities in the classroom.

Reading and Writing as Processes

Anyone who is aware of recent publications in both reading and writing knows that the focus of discussion is process. I contend that the stages of these processes in which the reader and writer are involved are similar and complementary. In writing, we talk about prewriting, drafting, revision, and publication. Although we can not make a one-to-one correlation to stages in the reading process, I believe the similarities are there and point the way to sound instruction.

Prewriting can involve the student in brainstorming, gathering information, reflection, discussion, to name just a few activities. Is there such a phase in reading? Yes! Sound reading instruction begins before the student reads and success with the printed page depends on some of the same activities as listed above. Instruction should involve students in a discussion of the material to be read before it is read. Students should be encouraged to glean information from headings, highlighted information, and visual material. Students need to raise questions about what they encounter in the reading experience. They should be required to predict what they expect at certain points in the reading and at the conclusion of the experience. Aren't these activities much the same and shouldn't we expect them to reinforce both learning experiences?

In the drafting stage of writing, the writer begins to bring shape to the written piece. Concerns focus on purpose, audience, the task itself, organization of material, choice of language and its presentation, and what will be the effect on the reader. I suggest that the reader passes through a similar stage even though not actively engaged in commiting words to paper. The reader is attempting to deal with the same concepts. What is the purpose? What effect is the writer attempting to have? How has language been used? What is the organizational structure of the piece? What has the author accomplished?

For instructional purposes, several strategies are suggested. The teacher needs to build students' prior knowledge base, to make certain that children have internalized story grammars and discourse structures. Students need experience in recognizing purpose, understanding the "why's" behind language selection and in working with the patterns of sentence structure.

The similarities of the processes cry for instructional strategies which enhance the student's development as s/he grows as an author and reader.

Reading and Writing Based on Whole Pieces of Text

Instruction in reading and writing should focus on whole pieces of text. For too often and for too long a period, students have suffered through a piece meal, sub-skill approach to both reading and writing. Research studies and surveys of educational practice confirm that not much time in reading is spent on instruction

in comprehension, particularly with longer pieces. Certain instructional practices in writing echo these findings. National reports indicate that perhaps less than 10% of a student's time in an English class is spent in writing complete pieces of discourse. Recent reviews of writing texts confirm that most attention is given to drill and practice on the conventions of language. Little space is given to the writing process.

Classroom practice, however, can reverse these findings. Teachers can easily surround children with larger and complete pieces of writing, whole pieces of literature, and skill development could focus on higher levels of cognitive concerns. Time can be given for reading enjoyment, and sharing of reading experiences can not only increase students' book contact time but expand experience and interests.

Writing instruction can be directly related to students' reading experience. Some researchers, notably Jim Squires, have suggested that text summarizing and retelling of a read piece can do much to increase students' reading comprehension. Students who are authors - those involved in the total writing process - bring a different perception to the piece read. They understand the struggle that the author has had; they recognize the difficulty in sustaining interest, in supplying supportive details, and in developing adequate description.

Whole pieces of text must be the emphasis in both reading and writing!

The Reader and Writer Bring Meaning to the Text

In both reading and writing meaning is brought to the text. In writing this is perhaps more obvious because it is the writer who shapes the piece, supplies the details, anticipates the needs of the reader, and attempts to communicate meaning.

The reader on the other hand obtains meaning from the written discourse and that meaning is likely to vary depending upon the varied experiential background of the reader. Louise Rosenblatt told us that the reader not only interprets the visual signs but also infuses meaning into them. Readers make meaning and contribute to the text.

Frank Smith tells us essentially the same thing when he indicates that if there is to be any comprehension, it must come from the meaning that the reader brings to the text. Words in and of themselves can not account for meaning.

Instructionally teachers can capitalize on this concept by enabling students to understand how they comprehend what is read and how they as writers convey what they mean to communicate. Open-ended questions on interpretation, inferencing, and relating to personal experience enhance a child's enjoyment and understanding of what has been read. By the same token, the writer is made to realize that the reader may lack experience with the topic, may not have background information that the author has. The author can not assume that all readers will approach what has been written from the same point of view or from the same prior knowledge base.

Conferencing as a classroom practice, particularly as a whole class actively, can help to develop students' awareness of what is needed to clarify, to explicate,

to detail, and to answer questions of the readers. Conferencing also indicates to the writer reactions that readers may have to a written piece.

Instructional practice must consider the relationships among the reader/ writer, meaning, and text.

Errors Have Meaning

In both reading and writing errors have meaning. The work of Kenneth Goodman and Mina Shaughnessy directs our attention to the fact that mistakes by children may indicate a struggle with new ideas, an attempt to apply old knowledge to new ideas, a new approach to the material, gaps of knowledge and experience, or patterns of the "home" language; and these errors can give us instructional direction. Work in spelling research suggests that mistakes made by young writers may not be mistakes at all, but rather can be considered as part of the child's growth pattern as a speller.

Much can be done to capitalize on this error information as students develop as readers and writers. We no longer should stress penalty for the student who errs; rather we need to find ways to make errors steps in development. The speller who makes mistakes does need time and experience to overcome difficulties plus some direct instruction. Expanded reading experiences, exposure to the printed page, and peer sharing also help to eliminate such problems.

Teachers have almost had a fetish with red markings on students' written materials in order to indicate errors. Little aid comes to the student with abundant markings of "sp", "awk" and "9 's" sprinkled throughout the written piece. Instead instruction needs to focus on helping the student become aware of such errors and providing students with strategies to eliminate them from the written product.

Errors of omission of material can quickly be eliminated through peer conferencing or by the teacher responding to the written piece. Even a common checklist which asks some direct questions of the writer can help move the child from repeated error making to a positive learning situation. Even drill and practice can have a direct relationship to the errors made in students' own work as opposed to a mutant-like approach to skill drill whether needed or not.

Positive instruction can take place when instruction relates directly to the work the child has done whether as a reader or writer.

Reading and Writing Can Be Taught

Evidence accumulates to prove that reading instruction has been quite successful in teaching students to decode. Reading test scores and teacher survey responses testify to this achievement. Each day brings witness to the fact that children can write also.

In practice, we need to guarantee that instruction in reading moves students beyond the decoding stage on to the higher levels of comprehension. Teachers through questioning techniques, through discussion, through précis and summarizing activities, through sharing and retelling can begin to move students toward a more comprehensive understanding of what they read and how they approach the text.

Students given the opportunity to write everyday in all disciplines, for different purposes and audiences, and in different forms are being taught not only how to write but also to value writing. Teachers who tactfully question, provide opportunities for peer response, and who develop a community of writers, schedule writing on a regular basis so that it occupies an important place in the instructional program surely are teaching writing.

The points discussed above certainly do not cover all the similarities or connections that can be made between reading and writing nor all the instructional practices possible. Unfortunately the comments have for the most part focused on the product rather than the student, and it is the student who should receive the focus of attention. In looking at these connections we do not want to lose sight of the fact that the writer needs a reader and in the classroom we ask the student to be both reader and writer; therefore, we need to give much attention to the person who sits before us who is eager to develop as a reader/writer. We have to have an environment within the classroom which supports and nurtures this growth. We need to be ready to assess the student not only as related to the product but as related to the processes involved in reading and writing. We need to question how the student reads and writes, how s/he feels about what s/he is doing, and to listen to the student's explanation and understanding of the process in which s/he is involved.

The separation between reading and writing is apparent and of long standing. For the benefit of the students in our schools, we need to narrow the separation, capitalize on the connections discussed, and develop students who are not only readers and writers but who recognize the worth and joy of their reading and writing accomplishments.

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